

Carnahan vows to oppose Bush's plans to make changes in Medicaid, Social Security

By Tim Rowden
Of the Post-Dispatch

U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, in the first State of the Congressional District address at Jefferson College, alluded to his days as a Boy Scout, when his Scout leader would admonish the boys to leave their campsite in better condition than they found it.

Carnahan, D-St. Louis, said he hoped to do the same for the congressional district.

Carnahan represents the 3rd District, which spans from University City to Cape Girardeau. He took office in January, succeeding Democrat Richard Gephardt, who retired.

About 34 people, including state representatives, county officials and business leaders, turned out Friday to hear Carnahan's speech and participate in a question-and-answer session on the Hillsboro campus of Jefferson College.

Carnahan plans to open a district office in Jefferson County next month.

Carnahan used the occasion to touch on a variety of topics, vowing to oppose further tax cuts "for the wealthiest Americans" and promising to consider the impact on today's children when debating legislative and budget questions.

One of his first priorities, Carnahan said, would be to address the rising costs of health care.

Carnahan said he would fight against cuts in Medicaid funding, support legislation to make it easier and safer to purchase prescription drugs from Canada and work with pharmaceutical companies to lower prescription drug costs.

"You and I will see what a lot of folks are made of before this debate is done," Carnahan said. "President Bush wants to cut \$60 billion from Medicaid. I will never back down from protecting Medicaid funding for our kids and our families."

Carnahan was equally critical of the No Child Left Behind law, which he said places strict requirements on local school districts to meet proficiency standards but provides little flexibility and no financial assistance to help schools meet those standards.

"The bottom line is our schools need more resources and less rhetoric," Carnahan said.

The congressman was equally critical of President George W. Bush's proposal to change Social Security and head off predicted shortfalls, by establishing personal private retirement accounts.

"I believe we need an honest, factual debate about Social Security," Carnahan said. "The fact is that Social Security is not bankrupt; it is sound for the next half-century."

Carnahan said he would support making adjustments to the program, to offset anticipated shortfalls as more Americans reach retirement age, but not privatization.

"I believe we can do that without dismantling the incredibly solid foundation of Social Security," Carnahan said. "It is the wrong direction, I believe, to privatize and to reduce benefits for people in the future."

One alternative, Carnahan said, would be to require participation in 401(k) plans offered by employers, to ensure that today's workers are saving and preparing for their futures

On a local level, Carnahan said he would work to secure federal transportation dollars to improve dangerous roads, such as highways MM and W.

Carnahan, who was appointed last month to serve on the House Transportation Committee, warned that competition for federal transportation dollars is stiff, but said, "I can assure you that's going to be among my highest priorities."